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ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether Chinese students' writing expertise would be closely related to their English writing expertise. Participants were six male and five female Chinese college graduates. All participants were asked to write two types of papers (descriptive and persuasive) in both languages. The first paper involved describing their personal experiences in learning how to write in English. The second was a letter clarifying a potential employer's questions and concerns about their English proficiency. The compositions were graded by two experienced university teachers. Data analysis indicated that there was a strong correlation between participants' first and second language writing expertise. Ideas the participants presented in Chinese assignments strongly related to their English writings. There was a correlation between overall performance when writing in Chinese and English grammar. When writing in English, participants' writing expertise in Chinese had a clear impact. When writing in Chinese, content was dominant, while when writing in English, grammar was dominant. Writing letters forced participants to be more focused. Implications for teachers of English as a Foreign Language are discussed. (Contains 27 references.) (SM)

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The Connections between L1 and L2 Writing Performances—from the Perspective of Writing Expertise

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ABSTRACT

Traditional EFL composition courses put undeserving emphasis on the scores of either proficiency test or compositions. This study follows the Process-oriented line of thinking and tries to prove, through a quantitative design, that Chinese students' writing expertise is closely related to their English writing. The purpose is to remind teachers of EFL composition to separate language factors from writing expertise. Making judgments based on the words and sentences in front of our eyes almost always inevitably slides into judgments of language factor alone.

Statistical findings prove that there is a strong correlation between subjects' L1 and L2 writing expertise. On the Chinese part, content is a dominant factor, whereas English grammar is dominant on the English side. This shows that language factor does pose a difficulty to subjects. Yet, they all fall back on their native language writing expertise and managed to write on.

The lesson from this study is that EFL composition teachers need to be able to identify language factor from writing expertise factor. From this distinction we can truly understand students' strength and weakness.

I. Introduction

English composition is always a great challenge for EFL (English as a foreign language) students as well as EFL teaching community. EFL students work very hard on it, but the result seems not very encouraging. The EFL teaching community strives hard to provide the best help, yet itself is still searching for a clear doctrine.

The EFL community used to hold the conviction that English proficiency scores can be a good indicator about student's overall English capability. EFL researchers, eager to adopt the so-called scientific method, applied this view to EFL researches. Consequently, measurable, quantifiable proficiency scores were widely used to interpret every aspect of students' proficiency levels.

This is how TOEFL scores used to be employed to thousands of EFL students all around the world. This is also how grades from proficiency tests are used to classify students and to assess students' performance and needs in English composition. This reliance on grades, on the written products naturally helped mold and solidify the methods employed in most EFL composition classes, namely giving grades and correcting errors.

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This had gone on until 1980's when some researchers finally questioned the validity of such proficiency tests (Lloyd-Jones, 1982; Odell, 1981). The Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S. (1980), worrying about the unspecified use of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores, pointed out: "While [TOEFL] scores from the low to the middle of high 500s are the most widely used for admission purposes they are probably the most difficult to interpret in terms of the candidate's ability to speak and write in English" (p. 18).

Clearly, a new direction is needed. Starting in early 1980's, a few researchers (Brooks, 1985; Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1976, 1982, 1983) began searching for an alternative. The new direction focuses on the process not the end product of writing. This type of research challenged the conventional view about the overwhelming influence of language factor and helped confirm the view that what a student do in the process of writing plays a significant role, to say the least.

The new research next searches for the definition of EFL writing competence. The focus has shifted to factors that may contribute to good EFL writing performance (Krashen, 1981, 1984). Researchers employed qualitative measures like, for example, case studies, and focused on the process of EFL or ESL (English as a Second Language) writings.

One of the logical methods is to separate language proficiency from writing expertise in order to identify the distinguishing factors. Consequently, some researchers focused their attention on the connections between L1 and L2 writing processes (Chen, 1992, 1996; Cumming, 1989; Moragne-e-Silva, 1992).

They all found similarities between L1 and L2 writing processes. Cumming (1989) claims that "second language proficiency did not visibly affect the processes of composing" and is "an additive factor" (p. 81). Chen (1992, 1996), on the other hand, concluded that "both language proficiency and writing expertise were involved and interacting" (Chen, 1992, p. 137). Both Chen and Cumming employed qualitative measures in their studies.

Such findings can be qualified as "a breakthrough." Yet, skeptics are still abound. Qualitative studies, though intensive, still are not convincing enough. Therefore, the challenge is on to design a quantitative study that would not fall into the trap of identifying language as the most distinguishing factor.

This paper intends to find the connections between L1 and L2 writings, but

through a quantitative measure. The purpose is to see if there is a quantifiable proof that may link L1 and L2 writings. Two questions are to be answered:

1. Is there any relationship between EFL students' writing performances in L1(Chinese) and L2 (English)?
2. Should such a link exists, is it primarily the writing expertise—content, structure-- or the language factor?

II. Review of Literature

The Transition

At a time when statistical analysis was the yardstick for science, the EFL writing researches focused their attention strictly on the finished products. The obvious quantifiable measure was the grades—grades of compositions and of proficiency tests. Naturally, English proficiency was found to be the dominant factor in EFL compositions (Chen, 1992, 1995, 1996; Raimes, 1985). Under such a circumstance, the term "writing performance" was almost equivalent to "English proficiency," while "writing skills" mostly meant "organizational skills."

For one thing, this approach oversimplifies the complicated nature of writing, let alone EFL composition. Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963), in a powerful study examining researches about composition in America, declared: "the business of writing is a mess." They went on to conclude that:

> Today's research in composition, taken as a whole, may be compared to chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy: some terms are being defined usefully, a number of procedures are being refined, but the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations (p. 5).

Their finding was shocking, but thought-provoking. Coincided with the introduction of process-oriented approach to language teaching in 1965, the composition research in America started another chapter. This conversion from traditional product-oriented approach to the process-oriented approach was initiated by scholars like Vygotsky (1962), Moffett (1968), Britton (1970), Elbow (1973) et al..

Whereas the field of EFL/ ESL composition research trails by about two decades.

Zamel pioneered this new approach in ESL composition research. She first studied ESL composition in 1976. In her 1982 case study of eight proficient ESL

students, her first research question was:

> Are ESL students experiencing writing as a creative act of discovery, or are they attending so much to language and correct form that writing is reduced to a mechanical exercise? (p. 199).

In the beginning, the ESL composition research focused on finding if ESL writers employ a writing process or strategy similar to that of native writers. Their findings challenged the prevailing emphasis on the formal aspect of language (Jones, 1983; Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1982, 1983) and confirmed the importance of ESL writers' writing expertise. Because all the subjects in those studies were engaged in creating meaning, regardless of their English difficulty. As Raimes (1985) concluded in her study of unskilled ESL writers:

> With context, preparation, feedback, and opportunities for revision, students at any level of 〔English〕proficiency can be engaged in discovery of meaning (p. 250).

Sources of Different Performances

As more and more studies on EFL/ESL composition focused on the process of writing, through qualitative measures, more in-depth information about the EFL/ESL writers has been accumulated. One common theme emerges from all the case studies about EFL/ESL writers: they are of various backgrounds. As a result, each student has his/her unique need for help in the process of writing. Classifying students of vastly different backgrounds by one measure only easily veils the truth we researchers have striven so hard for it. As Chen (1996) concluded:

> One possible reason for our lack of understanding about… is that complex variables are involved, like writing expertise, English proficiency, literacy experience, topic type… et al. (p. 22.20)

Naturally, the study of the process of writing enables EFL/ESL researchers to separate and identify different variables that may contribute to performance.

Vygotsky (1962) declared that thought co-exists interdependently with language. He advocates that the development of thought and language is an on-going, unfolding process. In this dynamic process, thought and language help shape each other into being. Therefore, the ability to write requires both the capability of logical thinking and the mastery of language code to a certain extend.

Following this line of thinking, Odell (1981) defined writing competence as: "... the ability to discover what one wishes to say and to convey one's message through

language, syntax, and content that are appropriate for one's audience and purpose" (p. 103). Krashen (1984), based on his Input Hypothesis, suggests two causes for the deficiency of some ESL writers:

1. Lack of acquisition of the code (written English).
2. A poor or inefficient composing process (p. 29).

Indeed, EFL writers are struggling with two demands at the same time: generating ideas for the content as well as finding the right language to present it. For the majority of EFL students, this is a sentence by sentence struggle. On them, we see Vygotsky's insight at work.

Cumming (1989) separated language proficiency and writing expertise in his studies of French-speaking Canadians. He found that those subjects with better writing expertise in the first language—French—behaved the same when writing in English, while their English proficiency had a minor effect on the writing expertise. He advocated that writing expertise is the primary factor and that "second language proficiency did not visibly affect the processes of composing" (p. 81). He called second language proficiency "an additive factor."

Crerand (1993), on the other hand, concluded that L2 learners do rely on L1 literary skills for L2 writing, and that L2 language proficiency, including oral skills, appears to affect L2 writing skills.

In his two studies, Chen (1992, 1996) compared EFL writers' writing processes in English and in Chinese. He found that "both language proficiency and writing expertise were involved and interacting" (Chen, 1992, p. 137). English is an "extra burden" (Chen, 1992, p. 131) for EFL writers. On the one hand, this language burden affects the process of generating the content:

> ...when writing in English the primary challenge EFL writers face is not language problems but how to use the language to create meaning (p. 131).

But on the other hand, subjects were concentrating on creating meaning, true to Raimes' (1985) finding. Consequently, Chen (1996) concluded:

> The logical explanation, both by theories or by the analysis of this study, is that students' writing expertise—methods, skills, experiences...--underlies their writing capability. Their language proficiency—English in this case—facilitates or impedes the application of their writing expertise (p. 22.19).

The importance of finding the connection between L1 and L2 writing expertise underscores a vastly different approach to teaching EFL composition. Because English

composition instructors must take up a bigger responsibility. Instead of giving grades and correcting errors, English composition instructors need to learn ways to identify students' strength and weakness first. As Chen (1996) concluded:

> The ability to write well involves both writing expertise and language proficiency. When a student has difficulty writing in English do we assume he/she doesn't know how to organize, has poor English, or has difficulty in using language to generate, organize, and present thoughts? Therefore, the challenge for ESL/EFL writing teachers is to see through the sentences and words in front of eyes and identify the share of responsibility between English proficiency and writing expertise (p. 23).

A Different Method of Verification

Focusing on the process of writing helped researchers gain in-depth understanding about the problems EFL writers face. Qualitative measures rely on the concept of "triangulation" (Mathison, 1988)—similar studies confirming the core findings. Yet, findings from qualitative studies are criticized for not persuasive enough. In addition, most teachers can easily be overwhelmed by the sea of data from a case study.

If we, on the other hand, can find a similar connection between L1 and L2 writings products, through statistical analysis, we can make our case stronger. Naturally, the focus must be shifted back to the finished products of writing.

The challenge is to design an experimental study that will not fall into the trap mentioned at the beginning of this study. Specifically, we need a study that could show a connection between L1 and L2 writing expertise, while, at the same time, the results will not be obscured by the dominance of English language factor.

For this purpose, we need to choose carefully our method of grading. A holistic grading scheme obviously will not work. A separate skills grading system will yield grades in different categories. Each of which can help focus graders' attention on a specific field. Data from different categories will enable us to separate language factors from writing expertise.

III. Methodology

This study was set out to find if writing expertise of L1 correlates with L2. It is imperative that this study defines the term writing expertise and language factor first. Writing expertise is defined as the skills, strategies, and methods of writing. Language

factor is defined as apparent language characteristics, like grammar, wording, and mechanics. For this purpose, this study employed a separate skills grading system: Content (30%), Structure (20%), Grammar (20%), Rhetoric (20%), and Spelling (10%). This grading system was used in the 1997 High School English Composition Contest sponsored by the MOE and held in Tunghai University. The system is molded after the ESL Composition Profile, developed by Jacobs, Zingraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey (1981). Their design is as followed: Content (30%), Structure (20%), Vocabulary (20%), Language Use (25%), and Mechanics (5%). For better or for worse, the system adopted by Tunghai university made a little adjustment on the three language-related categories. This should make it more clear for local graders.

For the above mentioned definition, content and structure will be classified as writing expertise; the other three the language factor. For each category, the grading sheet listed 4 different levels: excellent, good, fair, and poor. Each level is given a range of score and a description of the criteria.

Six male and five female Chinese college graduates participated in this study. These eleven subjects were asked to write two types of topics in both Chinese and English. The purpose is to see if there is a link between the scores of Chinese and English compositions. The two types of topic are: an article describing the subject's personal experience of learning how to write in English; writing a letter to clarify a potential employer's doubts and inquiry about the subject's English capability. The first can be categorized as a description; the second as a persuasion. Supposedly, the second assignment should be a little difficult.

Before the study, all subjects took an institutional TOEFL exam to verify their English proficiency. The Institutional TOEFL exam is made of recycled TOEFL test items. It is, according to ETS, equivalent to TOEFL tests. Subjects scored between 520 and 567. According to ETS definition, all eleven subjects can be categorized as "intermediate" level. This is exactly the level that students' writing capability is "the most difficult to interpret" (Council of Graduate Schools in the U. S, 1980, p. 18).

Data Collection

Subjects were divided into two groups. The first group started writing in English first while the second group started in Chinese. With an interval of at least one week, the two groups started writing the same topics in another language.

Subjects came to this researcher individually for each 1 hour session. They were not told of anything about the topic or the language to be used in advance. Neither did they know the names of other participants. Such a design was intended to minimize the influence of memory.

Every subjects finished writing before the time limit. After each writing, subjects were interviewed, individually of course, to brief what they had intended to write.

In all, each subject wrote 4 articles—2 in English and 2 in Chinese. In other words, for the two topics they wrote in both English and Chinese.

Since this study was to examine the connection between Chinese and English compositions, it would be more convenient if a uniformed grading criteria can be employed. The same grading system must be adapted to fit the Chinese language. The category "Grammar" is generally not consciously talked about. For the Chinese grading system, the term was literally changed to "the way language is used." Since Chinese words is composed of strokes not spelling, so the category "Spelling" in Chinese grading system shall be called "Words." The definition for the "Words" is: write and use the words correctly and use the punctuation correctly.

Each writing was graded by two experienced university teachers. English compositions were graded by two native speakers currently teaching in a university in Taiwan. Chinese compositions were graded by two experienced teachers holding a doctor degree in Chinese literature. In general, no sharp difference between graders was found and, thus, a mean score was recorded.

IV. Data Analysis

Descriptive Data

The scores of each subject's compositions are listed in Table 1. Judging from the mean score, we can barely detect any difference between topics. On the difference between scores on English and Chinese, we have to bear in mind that graders were applying different standard. It is very likely that English graders were treating these assignments like any composition they generally encounter in their EFL classrooms. But the two graders of Chinese literature were treating the assignments as compositions written by adult, educated writers. Consequently, to compare the scores

between languages proves hardly anything.

Table 1. Scores of each subject's compositions.

SUBJECT	1ST ENGLISH	2ND ENGLISH	1ST CHINESE	2ND CHINESE
Tang	73	71	70	67
Liu	77	85.5	57	65.5
Peng	82.5	69.5	61.5	63
Tsai	72	72	69	71.5
Huang	68	71.5	52.5	63
Fang	77.5	54.5	58	60.5
Ging	77.5	81.5	68	76
Se	84	87	77.5	71.5
Dai	89	82.5	63.5	66.5
Wu	75	77.5	59.5	65.5
Gao	69	72.5	55.5	43.5
Mean	76.8	75	62.9	64.9

The scores were statistically analyzed with the aim of finding Pearson correlation. The analysis showed that there are some significant correlations between the products of English and Chinese writing.

Correlation between Languages

As can be seen from Table 2, subjects' performance in English correlates with their performance in Chinese. Subjects' overall performance in English writing (total score) correlates with that of Chinese writing ($r=.428$, $p<.05$).

Table 2. Significant correlation between English and Chinese writing scores.

Variables	Correlation	2-tail Significance
English total vs. Chinese total	.428	.047*
English total vs. Chinese content	.526	.012*
Chinese total vs. English grammar	.466	.029*

Note:* represents $p\leq.05$; ** represents $p\leq.01$; ***represents $p\leq.001$

If we look closely, the total score of English writing correlates with the content

of Chinese writing (r=.526, p<.05), whereas the total score of Chinese writing correlates with the grammar of English writing (r=.466, p<.05). These findings seem to be surprising, specifically the correlation between the overall performance of Chinese writing and the English grammar.

In order to understand exactly what category of each language contributes to the correlation, a further analysis was done (Table 3).

Table 3. Significant correlation between categories of English and Chinese writings.

Variables	Correlation	2-tail Significance
English content vs. Chinese content	.462	.031*
English content vs. Chinese grammar	.428	.047*
English structure vs. Chinese content	.472	.026*
English rhetoric vs. Chinese content	.472	.027*
English rhetoric vs. Chinese structure	.455	.033*
English grammar vs. Chinese content	.451	.035*
English grammar vs. Chinese structure	.543	.009**
English grammar vs. Chinese words	.434	.044*

On the English part, of the five grading categories only spelling is not correlated with any Chinese grades. Clearly, English grammar correlates closely with three Chinese categories: content (r=.451, p<.05), structure (r=.543, p<.01), words (r=.434, p<.05). The correlation between English grammar and Chinese structure is amazingly significant. This shall have a strong impact on the overall finding.

However, on the Chinese part, all five grading categories have correlation with English grades. Chinese content is clearly the most significant contributor. It correlates with English content (r=.462, p<.05), English structure (r=.472, p<.05), English rhetoric (r=.472, p<.05), and English grammar (r=.451, p<.05).

A part of these findings is as expected—Chinese content correlates with 4 out of 5 grading categories on English; the other part of the findings is puzzling—English grammar plays an unexpectedly large role.

If we look further by breaking down the two topics, we may have a more precise picture about the correlation between languages.

Correlation between Topics

Subjects' performances on the two topics in either language are significantly related. This correlation shows, to say the least, the consistency of subjects' performances in the two topics. But, despite the fact that t-test could not yield significant difference of scores between the two topics, still, topic type difference should not be ruled out easily.

Table 4. Significant correlation between topics.

Variables	Correlation	2-tail Significance
1st English vs. 2nd English	.461	.031*
1st Chinese vs. 2nd Chinese	.534	.010*

The correlation between topics in each language further verifies this point (Table 4). The correlation between 1st Chinese and 2nd Chinese assignments seems to be stronger, as expected.

Once more, this study analyzed further into the correlation between categories. As we can see in Table 5, from the point of view of English, the second topic clearly exerts a dominating influence.

Of all the 11 correlations the statistical analysis has found between languages and topics, the first English topic contributes four items—two from content, one from grammar, and one from spelling. The second English topic contributes 7 items, of which 5 are grammar and structure and rhetoric each has one. No doubt the second English assignment has a lot more to do with the correlation between English and Chinese writing performances than the first English assignment. Specifically, grammar of the second English composition is truly a very dominant factor.

On the Chinese part, the first topic has five items that correlate with English writings whereas the second has six. For the 5 items of the first Chinese assignment, 3 items are structure (1 barely count), and grammar and words each has one item. As for the second Chinese assignment, 2 are content, 2 are structure, and 1 for grammar and words each. If we have to identify a dominant factor in Chinese writing, structure can qualify, barely.

This seems to be incompatible with the findings in Table 2 and Table 3, in which content of Chinese writing clearly correlates with English. Whereas in Table 5,

structure seems to be, at least, more noticeable. The only possible explanation for this is that the correlation of content is more powerful and, henceforth, more influential in the final result, though less in number count. But on the English side, grammar remains the dominant factor, except that it comes mostly from the 2nd topic.

Table 5. Correlation between languages and topics.

Variables	Correlation	2-tail Significance
1st English content vs. 1st Chinese grammar	.549	.008**
1st English content vs. 2nd Chinese grammar	.493	.020*
1st English grammar vs. 1st Chinese structure	.426	.048*
1st English spelling vs. 2nd Chinese structure	.515	.014*
2nd English structure vs. 2nd Chinese content	.497	.019*
2nd English rhetoric vs. 1st Chinese structure	.515	.014*
2nd English grammar vs. 1st Chinese structure	.415	.055
2nd English grammar vs. 1st Chinese words	.426	.048*
2nd English grammar vs. 2nd Chinese content	.559	.007**
2nd English grammar vs. 2nd Chinese structure	.451	.035*
2nd English grammar vs. 2nd Chinese words	.471	.027*

Correlation between Topics in Each Language

One more statistical analysis was carried out to understand the relationship between topics in each language. Through this analysis we may be able to understand the correlating effect of each grading category in each language. The findings of significant correlation between Chinese topics are listed in Table 6 and those of English topics are in Table 7.

In Table 6, there are 11 correlation between 1st and 2nd Chinese topics. When we look closely, we can see that on the 1st Chinese topic, content shares 3 correlation, structure shares 2 correlation, rhetoric shares 3, grammar shares 2, and words shares 1.

But when we look into the 2nd Chinese assignment, there is a strange phenomenon—words alone shares 5 correlation. Words of the 2nd Chinese assignment correlates with each of the 5 category of the 1st Chinese assignment. It seems that words of the second topic may be closely related with the overall performance of the

first topic. This is rather puzzling.

On the English part, the correlating effect is about evenly divided among the 5 categories on each topic (Table 7). If we look at the last two items of Table 7, we can see that subjects' grammar and spelling were very strongly consistent in both writing assignments. These reflect, to some extent, subjects' consistent performance of English capability.

Table 6. Correlation between topics in Chinese.

Variables	Correlation	2-tail Significance
1st Chinese content vs. 2nd Chinese content	.424	.049*
1st Chinese content vs. 2nd Chinese rhetoric	.622	.002**
1st Chinese content vs. 2nd Chinese words	.536	.010*
1st Chinese structure vs. 2nd Chinese rhetoric	.435	.043*
1st Chinese structure vs. 2nd Chinese words	.454	.034*
1st Chinese rhetoric vs. 2nd Chinese rhetoric	.616	.002**
1st Chinese rhetoric vs. 2nd Chinese grammar	.564	.006**
1st Chinese rhetoric vs. 2nd Chinese words	.494	.020*
1st Chinese grammar vs. 2nd Chinese grammar	.663	.001***
1st Chinese grammar vs. 2nd Chinese words	.467	.028*
1st Chinese words vs. 2nd Chinese words	.729	.000***

There is one more consistent feature of English: English grammar and rhetoric correlate with each other very significantly (items 2 and 3). This is a good indication that EFL writers' use of language as medium correlates closely with grammar.

Table 7. Correlation between topics in English.

Variables	Correlation	2-tail Significance
1st English content vs. 2nd English content	.522	.013*
1st English rhetoric vs. 2nd English grammar	.529	.011*
1st English grammar vs. 2nd English rhetoric	.567	.006**
1st English grammar vs. 2nd English grammar	.690	.000***
1st English spelling vs. 2nd English spelling	.700	.000***

Finally, let's take a look at the correlation between each grading category of one topic and the total score of another topic. This analysis will give us a better idea about the difference of topic types. As the findings in Table 8 show, subjects' performance in separate category on the first topic in either language does not correlate well with the total of the 2nd topic.

On the Chinese part (Table 8), only content of the 1st Chinese assignment correlates significantly with the total score of the 2nd Chinese assignment (r=.572, p<.01). The same situation happened on English: only grammar of the 1st English assignment has a significant correlation with the total score of the 2nd English assignment (r=.456, p<.033).

Table 8. Significant correlation between topics.

VARIABLES	2ND CHINESE RHETORIC	2ND CHINESE GRAMMAR	2ND CHINESE WORDS
1ST CHINESE TOTAL	r=.574 p=.005**	r=.572 p=.005**	r=.631 p=.002**
	1ST CHINESE CONTENT		
2ND CHINESE TOTAL	r=.572 p=.005**		
	2ND ENGLISH RHETORIC	2ND ENGLISH GRAMMAR	
1ST ENGLISH TOTAL	r=.448 p=.036*	r=.528 p=.012*	
	1ST ENGLISH GRAMMAR		
2ND ENGLISH TOTAL	r=.456 p=.033*		

But, on the other hand, subjects' performance in separate categories on the second topic in either language correlates much stronger with the performance on the first topic. Three categories—rhetoric, grammar, words-- of the 2nd Chinese topic correlate with the total score of the 1st Chinese topic. On the English side, two categories—rhetoric, grammar-- of the 2nd English assignment correlate with the total score of the 1st English assignment.

Here we are witnessing a mixed signal. On the one hand, only one category of the first topic has a significant correlation with the overall performance on the second topic. This can be viewed as a testament of topic type difference. Furthermore, all but

one of the correlation listed in Table 8 are language related. This shows that (a) even though subjects' use of language remains largely consistent in either type of topic, they obviously showed relatively different writing expertise on different types of topic; (b) when writing in Chinese, subjects' writing expertise is relatively consistent than when writing in English.

In all, topic type different, though not statistically significant in this study, is till a factor to be reckoned with.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Correlation between Languages

The statistical analysis has yielded some surprises and some expected findings as well. The correlation between the overall performances of English and Chinese writings is as expected all along. The correlation between the content of Chinese writings and the overall performance of English writings is comforting and, nevertheless, not surprising. In other words, the ideas each subject presented in Chinese assignments have a strong relation with their English writings.

The correlation between the overall performance of Chinese writings and English grammar stands the most surprising. It seems hard to believe that by judging subjects' grammar performance we can pretty much have an idea about their overall performance on Chinese writings. The ideal finding should be the reverse of English total vs. Chinese content (item 2 of Table 2).

A reasonable explanation is that when writing in English, subjects' writing expertise was impeded by their difficulty in English language (Chen, 1992, 1996). As a result, their performance in content and structure could not stand out as a distinguishing factor. Instead, their significance in correlation were overtaken by the more dominant grammar factor.

As we look into the correlation between the five grading categories in each language (Table 3), we can see clearly that English grammar exerts a strong influence. On the correlation between English grammar and Chinese structure alone the correlation is the strongest ($r=.543$, $p<.01$) among the 8 findings in Table 3.

The same findings also show that performance in Chinese content correlates

with every category, except spelling, of English writing performance. This proves that, to say the least, EFL students' writing expertise in native language is closely related to their performance in English writing.

The other finding about English grammar and Chinese overall performance makes one wonder: Is it possible that an EFL writer's ability to write in L1 is closely related with his/her ability in understanding and applying L2 grammar?

Correlation between Topics

When we examine the relationship between the two topics (Table 4), we can be sure that subjects' performances in both topics are closely related in either language. The correlation seems to be stronger in Chinese.

Again, when we further examine such a relationship by categories (Table 5), we can find more surprises. The second English assignment clearly exerts a lot of influence on the correlation. Specifically, the grammar factor of the second English assignment is very dominant. It is almost impossible to pinpoint a topic or any category that is as dominant.

Why the grammar of the second topic? Is topic type difference the likely culprit?

Correlation between Topics in Each Language

The most amazing finding in Table 6 is that the words factor—the construction and the correctness of the words and the punctuation—of the second Chinese assignment correlates with each of the five category of the first Chinese assignment. This factor unexpectedly overshadows the rest 4 categories and is in reverse of the findings on the first assignment.

When this study double-checked again the words factor of the first Chinese assignment, it did not correlate with any category of the 2nd assignment, except the words. Therefore, only in the second assignment does the words factor have such a correlation effect. It seems possible that subjects were treating this assignment very seriously. They wanted to do it right and were very careful about their words.

On the English part (Table 7), subjects' performance in any category of either topic is fairly consistent. In either assignment, grammar is closely correlated with both grammar and rhetoric of the other assignment. This, along with the very close correlation of spelling factor between the two assignments, shows subjects' consistent performance in L2 language skills.

Though there is not much evidence to support the topic type difference, but here a reasonable explanation has to fall back on the task of the second assignment—the findings in Table 8 give this argument more weight. If everything being equal, performance on the 1st topic should have shown a similar pattern.

It is likely that the nature of the second topic requires subjects to be more focused. It appears that they took different approaches toward different topics. As a result, their ability in correctly writing out words and using punctuation in the second assignment reflects, to some extent, their skills in applying language.

Conclusion

Because of the different design, this study was able to show that EFL writers' L1 performance is correlated with their performance in English. When writing in English, subjects' writing expertise in their native language has a clear impact.

Yet, we can not draw the same conclusion about English writing expertise. Obviously, English language difficulty was at work. As a result, subjects could not do as well a job in areas like content and structure. On the surface, their language skills is an important and consistent factor (Table 3), because their performances in content and structure fluctuate. The possible explanation is that subjects were impeded by the English language problem. Such an explanation corresponds well with arguments made by Chen (1992, 1996) and Crerand (1993).

From the view of the writing process, English language factor does pose difficulty on the process. But, at the same time, subjects were not troubled by it. Just like subjects in studies done by Chen (1992, 1996), Raimes (1985), and Zamel (1982, 1983), EFL writers, despite the language difficulty, all managed to cope with the problem and tried to concentrate on the meaning. The correlation between the total score of English writing and the Chinese content, as shown in Table 2, is, thus, not a coincidence. Therefore, we can never restate enough of Zamel's (1983) conclusion:

> Finally, while there is some concern with language-related difficulties, these difficulties do not seem to interrupt the ongoing process, but rather are addressed in the context of making and communicating meaning (p. 180).

As to the topic type difference, the second topic seems to have put some pressure on subjects. This can be supported by two findings: First, in Table 6, the words factor of the second Chinese topic correlates with each of every factor in the 1st

Chinese topic. In Table 8 we can find a similar proof. Second, in Table 8, as mentioned in page 14, the separate categories of the second topic seem to correlate with the total score of the 1st Chinese consistently in either language.

The implication of such a finding is that different types of topic will give students different motivation to approach the task. It seems that writing a letter forced subjects of this study to be more focused. As a result, the most visible impact is the fact that their performance in "mechanics"—writing words correctly in Chinese and use of grammar in English—becomes consistent and shows many significant correlation.

Implications

In terms of teaching, it is no longer sufficient to judge an EFL writers' strength and weakness by simply looking at the errors or grades of his/her English composition. Because the product itself hides many important information. When looking at the content and structure of an English composition we must bear in mind that they are the end results of an impeded process. The English language problem hinders their effort.

How, then, do we help students? Then the question is: Does giving grades and correcting grammar and spelling help students improve their ability to apply English language skills?

Krashen (1984) blames ESL writers' poor performance on two accounts (see page 4 of this paper). He advocates that students can acquire "the language code" through "large amounts of self-motivated reading for interest and/or pleasure" (p. 20). As to learning efficient writing process, he believes through actual writing practices, student will learn the appropriate "procedures that will facilitate the discovery of meaning and an efficient writing process" (p. 36).

Lee and Schallert (1998) also preach that EFL teachers should help students with lower English proficiency to improve their English first. Their study confirmed the "threshold hypothesis" and found that before students' English proficiency reaches a certain level, their expertise and experience in native language can not be transferred to the English setting.

Hall and Birkerts (1994) advocates that:

> There is no writing well without reading well. The two activities are intimately connected.... For both take place in and through language....

> Reading is the process of writing in reverse, and writing is the mirror image of reading. The mirror…is language itself (p. 26).

EFL composition instructors should, at least, embrace reading as part of their curriculum. Because reading helps with acquiring the language code, to say the least. Secondly, correcting errors is like curing the symptoms of a disease not the cause of the disease. Teachers should focus, instead, on the ideas and efforts behind the sentences and words. Only through these clues will teachers be able to find out what is troubling a certain student. Be able to separate writing expertise and language problem is the first step. This is, nevertheless, a giant first step.

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